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WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN TOYS

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Toys are tools of play for fun and learning. Wisely selected toys stimulate children's activities and initiative. Good toys provide opportunities for self-expression, use of newly acquired abilities, and development of new skills and abilities. They help children understand the world around them.

Here are some guides in selecting toys for children.

IS IT SAFE?

Is the toy or any removable part large enough so it cannot be swallowed or lodged in the ears or nose?

Are small parts so securely attached that they cannot come apart or be removed and swallowed?

Is it free of sharp edges and points, and made of a material which cannot break into jagged or easy-to-swallow pieces? Avoid glass and brittle plastic.

Are materials non-flammable, flame retardant, or flame resistant?

Is non-toxic paint used on painted toys?

Is it impossible for squeakers and other noise devices inside toys to be removed?

IS IT APPROPRIATE TO THE CHILD'S AGE AND DEVELOPMENTAL ABILITY?

When selecting toys for fun and learning, consider the following criteria for various age groups.

Babies and Toddlers

Can it be chewed on safely?

Are there moving parts to push, pull, turn, or otherwise manipulate safely?

Can it be easily grasped and used for banging?

Does it stimulate the senses — sight, hearing, touch, and smell?

Will it help develop large muscles and provide opportunities to run, jump, pound, climb, crawl, or push and pull?

Is it large enough for inexperienced hands and fingers to use?

Examples include: sturdy, colorful rattles; mobiles; soft, washable, squeaky toys; rubber balls; blocks; large beads; plastic bottles and dishes; pots and

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pans; push and pull toys; tyke bikes; large screws and nuts; and very simple puzzles with large pieces.

Pre-Schoolers

Does it allow the use of imagination?

Does it allow manipulation and activity by the child?

Does it satisfy the urge to be active?

Does it provide opportunity to imitate adult roles?

Does it provide opportunity for social interaction?

Is it large enough for easy handling?

Examples include: large crayons, paint brushes, and pencils; puzzles with large pieces; building blocks; playdough and clay; telephones; tricycles; sturdy wagons; wooden animals; dolls; store and housekeeping toys; and non-electric trains.

Middle Childhood

Will it teach new skills?

Can it be shared and enjoyed with peers?

Is it conducive to developing interest in future hobbies or a career?

Does it provide a realistic challenge?

Will it provide practice in reasoning and imagination?

Examples include: carpenter benches with lightweight tools; model construction sets; dolls and accessories; jacks; marbles; tops; kites; hobby materials, such as stamp or coin collections; sports equipment; games; picture puzzles; cameras; and bicycles.

Later Childhood and Teens

Is it challenging?

Will it help strengthen relationships with peers and adults?

Does it provide opportunity to pursue special interests and hobbies?

Does it provide opportunity to explore the arts and sciences?

Examples include: model kits; science kits; tennis rackets; oil-paint sets; equipment for needle, metal, or leather crafts; games of skill; and wood-carving materials.

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ALSO REMEMBER WHEN SELECTING TOYS

Children need toys and play materials during the entire year, not just at holidays or birthdays.

Toys should be fun now and promote self-satisfying experiences.

Toys which lend themselves to different kinds of play can be useful for a long time.

Toys should meet individual needs and interests.

This circular was prepared by Lynda Harriman, child development and family life education specialist. It extensively revises Circular 954 prepared by John A. Shultz.

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